

ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

All exterior changes visible from a public way made for the purpose of providing or improving accessibility for persons with disabilities require review and approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Boards of Architectural Review.

One of the biggest challenges facing historic buildings open to the public is making them accessible to persons with disabilities without destroying their historic or architectural character. This challenge was created, in part, by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which was passed by Congress in 1990. The Act significantly expanded accessibility requirements to include virtually all buildings which are open to the general public including historic structures.

Additional accessibility requirements modeled on the ADA were adopted by the Commonwealth of Virginia and incorporated as part of the Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC). In Alexandria, the USBC is administered by the Code Enforcement Bureau, Room 4200, City Hall, 301 King Street. (Telephone: 703/838-4360). An applicant is required to comply with both the ADA and the USBC.

Single and two family residential buildings as well as religious structures are exempt from the requirements of both the USBC and the ADA.

USBC requires that if a building which is a "public accommodation" is altered after January 26, 1992, the altered areas must be readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. An "alteration" to a building includes changes that could affect its use

by persons with disabilities and includes remodeling, renovation, restoration, reconstruction, structural changes and the rearrangement in the configuration of walls and partitions. Additionally, all new construction must be accessible and usable.

As of January 26, 1993 all places of public accommodation must comply with the provisions of the ADA.

A building that is open to the public is identified in the Act as a place of public accommodation. Places of public accommodation include restaurants, hotels, theaters, doctors' offices, pharmacies, retail stores, museums, libraries, parks, private schools and day care centers. All such places of public accommodation must remove architectural barriers where such removal is "readily achievable." The term "readily achievable" is defined by the Act as meaning easily accomplished with little difficulty or expense. However, there are no regulations that precisely define these terms. It is expected that all places of public accommodation will comply with the provisions of the ADA and the USBC.

While there are no exceptions to this requirement, a qualified historic building may be permitted to meet alternative minimum accessibility requirements. A qualified historic building is defined as one that is listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or one that is designated as historic under an appropriate State or local law.

Approval of alternative minimum accessibility under the ADA may be approved by the State Historic Preservation Officer in Virginia in consultation with interested persons. The State Historic Preservation Office is located in the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission, 221 Governor Street, Richmond. (Telephone: 804/786-3143). For example, the ADA regulations provide that ramp slopes for historic building can be modified, if approved.

Alternative minimum accessibility requirements under the USBC may be approved by the Director, Code Enforcement Bureau, City of Alexandria.

Following approval for alternative minimum accessibility standards, a certificate of appropriateness must then be reviewed and approved by the Boards of Architectural Review.

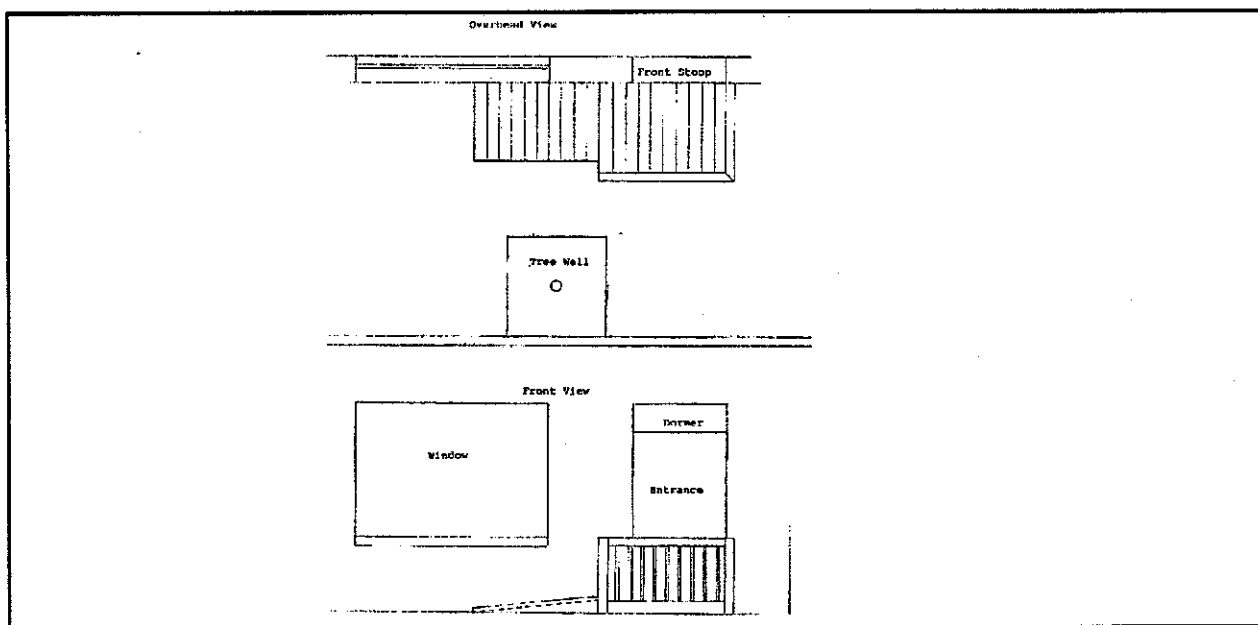
There are a number of means of making buildings in the historic districts accessible without unduly compromising the historic integrity of the structure. Alternatives to physical changes to a building should be explored before considering undertaking alterations. For example, in some instances, retailers may be able to designate an employee to provide access to products to persons with disabilities off-site.

If physical changes must be made, there are some simple solutions that can be used to accommodate wheelchair accessibility to a historic structure with minimal impact. For example, thresholds at doorways can be removed and an interior ramp provided so that the exterior appearance of a historic structure remains unchanged. Another alternative is to alter the level of the surrounding grade so that it gently slopes up to meet an entranceway. Mechanical lifts can be installed to provide access to an entrance.

There are a number of products specifically designed to provide accessibility to historic structures. For example, wheelchair lifts can be installed below grade so that there is no physical alteration to the exterior of a structure. In instances where physical alteration of a building takes place, it is also likely that compliance with the USBC and the ADA may involve the reconfiguration of historic doorways and doors to accommodate the width of wheelchairs. In addition, door hardware may have to be modified to meet USBC and ADA requirements.

REQUIREMENTS

- Construction projects to improve or provide accessibility for persons with disabilities must meet the requirements of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) and require the issuance of a building permit.
- Construction projects to meet the requirements of the ADA must meet the requirements of the *Accessibility Guidelines for Building and Facilities* issued by the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers



Proposal for a painted wood accessibility ramp for a coffee shop.

SOURCE: 102 South Patrick Street, BAR Case #91-151, Michael Elmendorf, designer

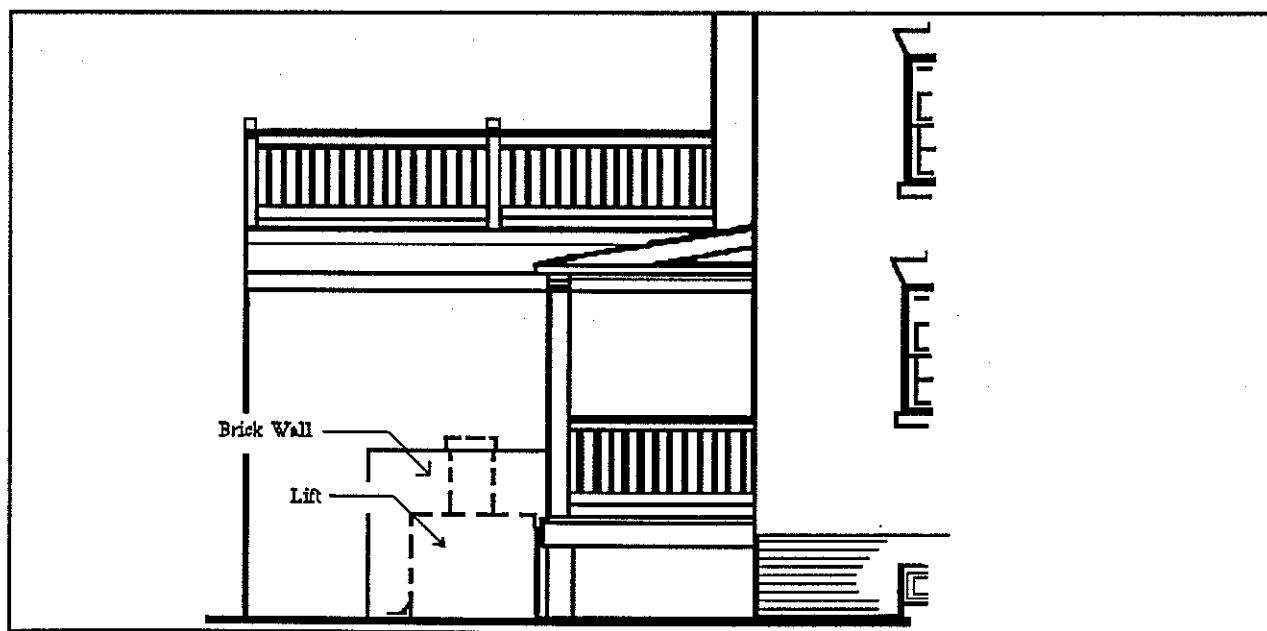
Compliance Board (56 FR 35455).

- Signage indicating accessible entrances and routes must be a part of any accessibility project. In some instances such signage may also require review and approval by the Boards of Architectural Review.
- Hand railings are required for accessibility ramps over 6" in height or greater than a 1:20 slope, except for single family dwellings or those which do not serve as an exit for a commercial or multi-family structure (USBC).
- Accessibility ramps not more than 12' in length including the landing are permitted to project into the public right-of-way a specified number of feet depending upon the width of the street.
- Accessibility ramps which project into the public right-of-way beyond the permitted length must have an approved encroachment ordinance passed by City Council.
- Vision clearance. There is a general City requirement that buildings on corner lots must maintain a vision clearance at the corner for purposes of transportation safety. In

such instances, structures may be no higher than 42" (3' 6") above the curb. There is also a general policy to maintain the building line in the historic districts. Therefore, the Zoning Ordinance gives the Boards the power to waive this requirement as well as other yard requirements where it determines that the maintenance of the building line is important.

GUIDELINES

- The Boards recognize the importance of balancing accessibility with historic preservation objectives and require that access be appropriate to the historic structure. Thus, the Boards may require an applicant to seek approval of alternative minimum accessibility requirements from the State Historic Preservation Officer and/or approval of Virginia USBC modifications from the City's Director of the Code Enforcement Bureau.
- Accessibility ramps and structures should not hide, obscure or cause the removal of historic architectural details.



Location for mechanical wheelchair lift and brick screening wall proposed as part of a renovation plan for an office building.

SOURCE: 500 North Washington Street, BAR Case #90-107, Thomas Mannon, AIA, architect (Redrawn)

- The goal of the Boards is to balance accessibility with historic preservation. As such, the applicant should carefully study the use for every possible entrance to the structure of access within the confines of the ADA and the USBC.

- While it is expected under the ADA and the USBC that access will be located at the most widely used entrance to a building and not located at a secondary entrance or an otherwise little used entrance, the Boards may require an applicant to seek appropriate modifications where providing access at such primary locations would result in the loss or concealment of exterior historic architectural fabric or character.

- Accessibility ramps and structures should be made of materials which are sympathetic to the building materials generally found in the historic districts. For example, throughout the historic districts painted wood is an appropriate material for accessibility ramps.

However, 20th century mass produced wrought iron railing material is only appropriate for buildings post dating ca. 1950.

- Accessibility ramps constructed of unpainted pressure treated wood are strongly discouraged.

- Signage to indicate access routes must meet the requirements of the Sign Guidelines, Chapter 1.

- In some instances, accessibility ramps and structures should be screened or landscaped to minimize adverse impact on historic structures.

- Accessibility ramps and structures should generally be painted the predominant color of the building or the color of the trimwork.

- Handrails should be designed to be minimum visual elements. Pickets should not be

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The construction of accessibility ramps and structures that create ground disturbing activities may affect archaeological resources. With its rich history, the City of Alexandria is particularly concerned about its archaeological heritage. Archaeological resources in the historic districts are great in number and highly diverse in materials. They often consist of ceramic and glass fragments in the backyards of historic properties; however, archaeological resources are also brick-lined shafts in yards and basements; brick kilns; foundations, footings, postholes and builders trenches of non-extant buildings; landscape features such as walkways and gardens; and even American Indian artifacts which pre-date colonial Alexandria. Often these clues to the City's past appear to be unimportant debris, yet when the artifacts and building remains are excavated and recorded systematically, they provide the only knowledge of lost Alexandria.

Every application to the B.A.R. which potentially involves ground disturbance is reviewed by the City Archaeologist to determine whether significant archaeological resources may still survive on the property. Therefore, the potential for additional requirements to protect archaeological resources exists with any project that involves ground disturbing activities.

The applicant can speed along the archaeological review process by requesting a Preliminary Archaeological Assess-

ment from Alexandria Archaeology at the earliest date. Call (703) 838-4399, Tuesday through Saturday. Alexandria Archaeology is located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

• RESIDENTIAL ZONES

In residential zones, the application for construction of accessibility ramps and structures that involve ground disturbing activities is reviewed by City archaeologists. In most cases, the applicant is required to notify Alexandria Archaeology before ground disturbance, so that a City archaeologist may monitor this work and record significant finds. However, when a property has a high potential for containing significant archaeological resources, a City archaeologist may request permission to excavate test samples in the affected area before the project begins.

• COMMERCIAL ZONES

In commercial zones and residential projects involving the construction of three or more houses, the ground disturbing activities associated with the construction of accessibility ramps and structures may necessitate compliance with the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure (§ 11-411 of the Zoning Ordinance). The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist. Occasionally, compliance in such projects may require the property owner to contract with an independent archaeologist to document conditions before and during construction. Property owners should contact the City Archaeologist as early as possible so that there are no project delays.

included unless required as a guardrail.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All applications for approval of accessibility ramps and structures must contain the following information:

Alexandria Business License

Proof of a valid Alexandria Business License is required at the time of application for contractors, subcontractors, architects, and designers.

Photographs of Existing Building

Clear photographs of the existing building are required for reference.

Plot Plan

A plot plan accurately showing the location of the proposed accessibility ramp or structure is required.

Drawings

Drawings accurately representing the elevation to be altered by the accessibility structure and the proposed accessibility modification indicating materials and overall dimensions including height are required. The drawings should have a minimum scale of $\frac{3}{32}'' = 1'$ and at least one set must meet the minimum permit size of 24" x 36". The major dimensions of the existing building and the modification must be indicated. Additional copies of the required drawings may be reduced if they are clearly legible.

Materials

The materials to be used for the accessibility ramp or structure must be specified.

Type

For manufactured products, a cut sheet or manufacturer's specifications accurately depicting the proposed accessibility structure must be included.

Color

The proposed color of the accessibility modification must be indicated and an actual color sample provided.

RELATED SECTIONS

Signs

Stoops, Steps and Railings

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Alexandria Commission on Disabled Persons

Telephone: (703)838-0710

TDD: (703)836-1493

NOTE: Illustrations are provided for information only. Applications for certificates of appropriateness are reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

ADOPTED BY THE BOARDS OF
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW 5/25/93